



Technological University Dublin  
**ARROW@TU Dublin**

---

Books/Chapters

School of Business and Humanities

---

2007

## John Broderick (1924-89) and the French 'Roman Catholique'.

Eamon Maher

*Technological University Dublin*, [eamon.maher@tudublin.ie](mailto:eamon.maher@tudublin.ie)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ittbusbks>



Part of the [French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Maher, E. : John Broderick (1924-89) and the French 'Roman Catholique', in Maher, E., O'Brien, E., Neville, G. (eds.) *Reinventing Ireland Through a French Prism*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2007.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Business and Humanities at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Books/Chapters by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact [yvonne.desmond@tudublin.ie](mailto:yvonne.desmond@tudublin.ie), [arrow.admin@tudublin.ie](mailto:arrow.admin@tudublin.ie), [brian.widdis@tudublin.ie](mailto:brian.widdis@tudublin.ie).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License](#)



Eamon Maher

## Chapter Fourteen: John Broderick (1924-89) and the French 'Roman Catholique'

Before embarking on any analysis of the extent to which the Irish writer John Broderick was influenced by the French 'Roman Catholique', it is important that we have some idea of how that particular form of writing experienced a renewal of popularity in France at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. In this respect, the work of Richard Griffiths is an indispensable reference point.<sup>1</sup> Griffiths argues that Catholic writing was in some ways at variance with religious developments at the time, in that 'le renouveau littéraire s'affirmait comme un retour en arrière, une tentative de restauration des valeurs des siècles passés.'<sup>2</sup> Writers like Huysmans, Bloy and Bernanos felt a certain nostalgia for a glorious Catholic past and their novels emphasised how the supernatural can make its presence felt on the temporal world. Thus, we encounter in their works numerous examples of dramatic events such as divine revelations, miraculous cures, people with the ability to read into others' souls, things that were not commonly embraced in the more cultivated Catholic circles of the time. They were united in their strong distrust of the secular Republic and the materialistic concerns of the bourgeoisie, as well as in their support of the poor and the downtrodden. But fear was also a strong motivation:

Jusque dans les efforts de dissémination de leur foi, ils étaient poursuivis par la peur, peur d'être une minorité écrasée par la masse. Ils se concentraient sur la vie intérieure, ne pratiquant plus l'apostolat que par la prière personnelle, l'acceptation de la souffrance, ayant presque toujours renoncé à prêcher et à persuader. Cette tendance n'était pas uniquement le fruit de la peur, bien entendu ; elle provenait aussi

<sup>1</sup> Richard Griffiths, *Révolution à rebours : Le renouveau catholique dans la littérature en France de 1870 à 1914*. Translated by Marthe Lory (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Griffiths, p.317.

d'une attention exagérée apportée aux phénomènes mystiques et à leurs effets tangibles ; la vie mystique apparaissait donc comme la forme la plus importante et la plus agissante de l'action.<sup>3</sup>

There was a deep-seated enmity between anticlerical republicans and Catholics in France at the end of the nineteenth century and thus, in some ways as a reaction against their republican enemies, many Catholic writers emphasised the mystical and the supernatural and encouraged a return to a hierarchical class system. Such a system would be one in which rich and poor worked in harmony and where the rights of all were respected. The idealisation of the past is a common thread running through Catholic literature in France up to the outbreak of World War I in particular – it remains strong in Bernanos throughout his works. Anti-modern, pro-mystical, anti-republican and pro-monarchy, these are the distinguishing features of many French Catholic writers. Bernanos had no qualms about openly attacking his enemies – particularly Anatole France, Brémond and Gide – in his pamphlets and novels. He also revealed an anti-Semitic bias at times. Miracles abound in his writings, many of which feature priests as their main characters. With Mauriac, it was less a question of attacking enemies and emphasising the spectacular power of grace than of exploring the anguished souls of his characters, whose spiritual dilemmas reflected many of the writer's own religious doubts. He despised hypocrisy in all its guises, a trait he shares with Bernanos and the French-American, Julien Green. Bernanos, Mauriac and Green are the best-known French Catholic novelists. But the term is not one that particularly suited any of them. It is strange to note that the decline of Christian faith in France coincided to a large degree with the popularity of the 'Roman Catholique'. The Catholic novelists go against the trend that was described by T.S. Eliot as 'the gradual secularization of literature.' But, in the opinion of Malcolm Scott:

The term 'Catholic novelist', which is the only one I can think of to embrace Barbey d'Aurville, Bloy, the later Huysmans, Mauriac, Bernanos, and Julien Green,

<sup>3</sup> Griffiths, p.319.



has been blighted by unhelpful assumptions that it must refer to a novelist who puts his art to the service of the orthodox views of the Catholic Church and faith.<sup>4</sup>

Scott makes a very valid point here, namely that novelists who also happened to be Catholic did not necessarily see their role as one of fighting the cause of the Catholic Church. Rather, they saw themselves as writers first and foremost, and then Catholics – this is less true of Bernanos than the other two writers. They didn't want to be conscripted to a non-literary cause, to become apologists for the Catholic faith. What the reader should bear in mind when reading this chapter is that there is no simple definition that covers all the preoccupations of the 'Roman Catholique' in the same way as there is no way of supplying a list of normative values that inspire any group of writers belonging to a certain 'school'.

John Broderick, from the Irish midlands town of Athlone, where his family owned the local bakery, is a novelist who has not to date been given the sort of recognition that his talent deserves. It is true that his later novels suffered from what Patrick Murray described as a steady 'declension',<sup>5</sup> particularly evident after *An Apology for Roses* (1973), and that he never again regained the tightness and focus of the novels of the 1960s, especially his first offering, *The Pilgrimage* (1961), and another book from the same decade, *The Waking of Willie Ryan* (1965), which will form the main thrust of this chapter. In addition to being a novelist, Broderick was also a literary critic with *The Irish Times* and in this task he displayed the same type of inconsistency that would mark his personality and literary production. A huge admirer of Kate O'Brien, he was similarly well-disposed to his younger distant cousin, John McGahern. On the other hand, he was scathing in his dismissal of Edna O'Brien and was equally suspicious of the British reputation of Seamus Heaney, which according to Patrick Murray, 'he thought had more to do with political than literary criteria.'<sup>6</sup> So when we speak of Broderick, we are dealing with a complex man, someone who at times deliberately courted

<sup>4</sup> Malcolm Scott, *The Struggle for the Soul of the French Novel: French Catholic and Realist Novelists 1850-1970* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Murray, "Athlone's John Broderick", in *Éire-Ireland*, Volume XXVII, Number 4, Geimhradh-Winter 1992, pp.20-39, p.35. This is by far the most comprehensive assessment of Broderick's *oeuvre* currently available.

<sup>6</sup> "Athlone's John Broderick", p.22.

the limelight by being controversial. He was not at all amused either when his own work was attacked by literary critics, and one of his failings as a writer was his inability to rectify flaws that were correctly pointed out by prescient readers.

By his own admission, Broderick looked to continental Europe, and particularly to France, for his literary inspiration. In *The Irish Times* (1 June, 1989), he stated that François Mauriac was the only literary influence of which he was aware. He was also a close friend of the French-American, Julien Green, whom he visited in Paris and for whom he acted as guide when Green came to visit Ireland in the 1970s. Mauriac and Green, as we have already seen, are closely associated with the genre known as the 'Roman Catholique' - or Catholic Novel - in France, a label both rejected quite vigorously. Mauriac struggled to convince some of his Catholic readers that what he wrote was compatible with his religious convictions. In *Le Roman*, a work in which he outlined his philosophy of the novel, he stated that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was necessary for French writers to move out from under the shadow of Balzac, whose characters were confined to the role of types, and move closer to the illogicality that characterises the creations of Dostoevsky, many of whom, like Mauriac's own, are consumed by evil. His strong religious beliefs were a major source of conflict for Mauriac who wondered if the very act of writing was compatible with the state of grace. He summed up his dilemma in the following terms:

Un écrivain catholique avance sur une crête étroite entre deux abîmes : ne pas scandaliser, mais ne pas mentir ; ne pas exciter les convoitises de la chair, mais se garder aussi de falsifier la vie. Où est le plus grand péril : faire rêver dangereusement les jeunes hommes ou, à force de fades mensonges, leur inspirer le dégoût du Christ et de son Église ?<sup>7</sup>

In the end, Mauriac came up with the following formula: you must purify the source. By this he meant that his responsibility as a novelist was to

<sup>7</sup> 'A Catholic writer advances along a narrow crest between two chasms: he cannot be a cause of scandal and yet he cannot lie either; he must not excite the desires of the flesh and yet he must also beware of the danger of giving a false picture of life. Which is the greater danger: making young people dream in an aberrant manner or inspiring disgust in them for Christ and His Church?' François Mauriac, *Le Roman* (Paris: L'Artisan du Livre, 1928), p.80. My translation.



write with a pure heart so that those who subsequently read him would not be contaminated by his books. Such an approach did not always work. Donat O'Donnell (*nom de plume* for Conor Cruise O'Brien), writing in his ground-breaking study, *Maria Cross*, was sensitive to Mauriac's dilemma when he described the 'haunted landscape' of the novels of the 1920s, 'through which flows a fiery river of lust' and concluding that 'evil is not merely tangible and odorous but often seductive as well.'<sup>8</sup> As will be clear from the quotation above from *Le Roman*, Mauriac knew that his position was perilous. How was he to supply an authentic portrayal of the modern world without compromising his Catholic beliefs? The problem would have been far less grave if he didn't at times betray a connivance with sin and sinners. Catholic critics felt they had the right to expect an uncompromising detestation of sin from a Catholic writer. In response to a rather provocative question from Frédéric Lefèvre, "Monsieur François Mauriac, romancier catholique ?", Mauriac replied: "I am a writer and a Catholic and there is the conflict [...] I believe, in fact, that it is fortunate for a novelist to be a Catholic, but I am also quite sure that it is very dangerous for a Catholic to be a novelist."<sup>9</sup> Mauriac thought long and hard about the possible reconciliation of his writing with his religious beliefs without ever truly coming up with a solution other than attempting to ensure that what he wrote didn't corrupt his readers. As an artist, however, he had a duty to allow his characters the sort of latitude that God affords to Mankind. From an artistic point of view also, there is a natural preference, in Mauriac's view, for the prodigal son:

[...] lorsque l'un des mes héros avance docilement dans la direction que je lui ai assignée, lorsqu'il accomplit toutes les étapes fixées par moi, et fait tous les gestes que j'attendais de lui, je m'inquiète ; cette soumission à mes desseins prouve qu'il n'a pas de vie propre, qu'il ne s'est pas détaché de moi, qu'il demeure une entité, une abstraction ; je ne suis content de mon travail que lorsque ma créature me résiste, lorsqu'elle se cabre devant les actions

<sup>8</sup> Donat O'Donnell, *Maria Cross* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953), pp.3, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Taken from Lefèvre's interviews, *Une Heure avec...* (Paris : Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1924).

que j'avais résolu de lui faire commettre ; peut-être est-ce le fait de tous les créateurs de préférer à l'enfant sage l'enfant récalcitrant, l'enfant prodigue.<sup>10</sup>

The setting of most of Mauriac's novels, the rural bourgeois area of Les Landes, near Bordeaux, is at something of a remove from Broderick's Athlone with its 'nouveau riche' merchant class, and yet both writers were fascinated by the prevalence of social posturing and religious hypocrisy among the class into which they were born. Both were committed Catholics, and Catholicism plays a major role in their novels. The same is true of Julien Green, a convert from Protestantism, for whom spirituality and art were inseparable. He often claimed that he revealed more about himself through his fictions than he did in his autobiographical writing. In his *Journal*, he wrote:

Je travaille avec la rage d'oublier, de me plonger dans un monde imaginaire. Et qu'est-ce que je retrouve dans ce monde imaginaire ? Mes problèmes démesurément grandis jusqu'à atteindre des proportions terrifiantes.<sup>11</sup>

Green was tormented by his homosexual leanings, which conflicted with his deep-rooted spirituality – Broderick experienced similar problems. Green and Broderick explore homosexual attraction among many of their male protagonists and at times betray misogynist tendencies in their portrayal of women who are in many instances lascivious, insatiable and immoral.<sup>12</sup> Both men retained a wistful nostalgia for Tridentine rituals and deeply regretted the abolition of the Mass in Latin in the wake of Vatican II. Writing in the *Weekend Supplement* of *The Irish Times* on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, 1979, Broderick excoriated the manner in which the Catho-

<sup>10</sup> *Le Roman*, pp.62-3.

<sup>11</sup> "I write out of an urgent need to forget, to plunge myself into a fictional world. And what do I find in this fictional world? My own problems which have been greatly heightened, to the point where they attain terrifying proportions." Quoted by Jacques Petit, *Julien Green, 'l'homme qui venait d'ailleurs'* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969), p.236. My translation.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Murray argues that it is tempting to read Broderick in Freudian terms. His father died when John was only three and his mother's remarriage to Paddy Flynn, foreman at the bakery, caused much upset for the young boy: 'His lifelong attitude to his mother, which influenced his view of other women both in his fictions and in his life, was compounded of an intense devotion and an underlying sense of betrayal.' Murray, "Athlone's John Broderick", pp.31-2.



lic Church was pursuing the popular line to the point of endangering the mystery at the heart of the Eucharist:

It is now clear that the clergy are prepared, either through ignorance or self-indulgence, to play down to the worst instincts of the people. We are told that Pop Masses appeal to the young; which is like saying that Barbara Cartland should be encouraged because she appeals to more readers than Jane Austen.<sup>13</sup>

As you can see, he didn't believe in taking prisoners! But his comments are revealing of his conservative leanings. Having pointed out some of the general preoccupations the Irish writer shared with his French counterparts, Mauriac and Green, we will now move on to a discussion of a couple of his novels, which dramatise the concerns of all three writers.

*The Pilgrimage* is a Mauriacian novel in terms of its classical, economical style and the psychological probing of its main character, Julia Glynn, the wife of a wealthy builder in a provincial Irish town. Julia's husband, Michael, a good deal older than she, is crippled with arthritis and this affords her the freedom to engage in sexual adventures with various lovers, most notably Michael's nephew, Jim, a doctor with a practice in Dublin and who comes to visit his uncle once a week. This visit twins as an occasion for Jim and Julia to make love:

There was always the necessity for haste. At first Julia had found this exciting: the brutal directness of such lovemaking had something of the anonymity of elemental sensuality. It was enough merely to hold that great body, never more than half undressed, in her arms on the bed, or more often simply standing against the locked door of the darkened room.<sup>14</sup>

This furtive lovemaking takes place when the manservant, Stephen, drives Fr. Victor back to the monastery after his weekly visit to the Glynn household. Fr. Victor is encouraging Michael to take a trip to Lourdes where he may be cured of his illness. Nobody really believes that the miracle will take place, but they indulge the invalid by having Masses

<sup>13</sup> John Broderick, "A Curate's Egg at Easter". *Weekend Supplement to the Irish Times*, 14 April, 1979.

<sup>14</sup> John Broderick, *The Pilgrimage* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2004), p.13. All the subsequent quotes will be from this edition, with page numbers in brackets.



said for his special intention and saying prayers in his room. There is a marked contrast between the religiosity of Michael and the immorality of his wife. When anonymous letters begin to arrive describing her affair with Jim in graphic terms, Julia fears that her comfortable life could be coming to an end. Her relief is huge when she discovers that it is Stephen, mad with jealousy, who is responsible for sending them. A sensual woman, Julia needs lovers in the same way as others crave money or jewellery. An easy conscience makes her deceptions even more pleasurable: 'She had never at any time suffered from a sense of sin.' (p.27)

While definitely no saint, Broderick doesn't imply that Julia is any worse than those who surround her. For example, during their honeymoon Michael became infatuated with a German man, with whom he corresponded for some time after their return to Ireland. On the infrequent occasions he chose to make love to his wife, he showed a tendency towards brutality. In fact, sexuality in the book is rarely bereft of a sordid element. Stephen is besotted with a local homosexual, Tommy Baggot. His feelings never assume any overt sexual dimension – he is a devout Catholic and is totally unaware of Tommy's notorious reputation in the locality and in Dublin. Stephen is, in fact, quite the innocent and his relationship with Julia begins when he makes love to her one night while she is totally inebriated. He doesn't refer to the incident the next day: everything is couched in silence. While she is happy to have a ready replacement for Jim when his engagement to the daughter of a wealthy business man and politician spells an end to their liaison, Julia is nonetheless conscious of the fact that Stephen would suffer serious remorse if he felt that his relationship with her was not inspired by love. He had, in her view, a repressed sexuality:

She doubted if Stephen, who, she had no doubt, loved her in his own fashion, would ever be able to dissociate lovemaking from the furtive, the sordid, and the unclean. Few Irishmen, she knew, ever were. The puritanism which was bred in their bones, and encouraged in their youth by every possible outside pressure, was never entirely eradicated. (p.171)

Such a distorted attitude to sex brings to mind Julien Green's Joseph Day, the hero of his chef d'oeuvre, *Moïra*, published 10 years before *The Pilgrimage*, and a book that Broderick would most certainly have read. Day goes to university in Virginia (Green himself did his university studies in the American south) to study Greek with a view to reading the Bible in the original. His red hair and fiery disposition reflect his passionate na-

ture, a nature he attempts in vain to subdue. Attracted to a classmate, Praileau, whose disparaging comments lead to a serious fight between the two, Joseph ends up being seduced by his landlady's daughter, Moïra (which means fate in Greek). When he wakes up and realises that she has been the occasion of sin, he suffocates her with a pillow. Joseph Day, like Stephen, is distrustful of the flesh and sees women as little better than harlots. He is horrified when he notices his landlady is wearing rouge on her lips, like a Jezebel! She is attracted to her lodger who is almost totally unaware of the emotions he evokes in others. She tries to provoke him with some robust questions and this causes Joseph to question what is behind her attitude towards him:

Pourquoi cette femme lui avait-elle parlé de cette manière ? Et pourquoi donc avait-elle ri ? Sans doute, il aurait pu se montrer plus aimable, mais ce visage fardé lui avait paru horrible. Chez lui, un garçon honnête ne parlait pas à une femme fardée et celle-ci était peinte comme une Jézabel.<sup>15</sup>

He tells his friend, David Laird, that he hates the sexual instinct as it is an obstacle that intrudes between him and God. The underlying tension in *Moïra* is that Joseph Day cannot fight his true leanings: his nature and destiny point him towards Praileau in a situation that mirrors Green's own itinerary. In 1973, in the Pléiade edition of his works, Green took the decision to include a section entitled "Jean's Confession" that he had excised from the original 1948 version of *Le Malfaiteur*. It constitutes a moving plea for more understanding in relation to homosexuality:

C'est là le plus dur châtement de l'individu qu'un penchant sexuel met au ban de la société ; il en est réduit à feindre ou à faire un éclat, et si le cœur lui manque de se déclarer, il est injustement contraint à vivre en hypocrite.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Moïra*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Tome III, édité par Jacques Petit (Paris : Gallimard/Éditions de la Pléiade, 1993), p.7.

<sup>16</sup> 'The most wrenching punishment that can befall an individual whose sexual orientation causes his banishment from society is that he be reduced to pretence or to making a major scene. And if he doesn't have the heart to declare himself, he is unjustly obliged to live like a hypocrite.' Julien Green, *Le Malfaiteur* (Paris: Fayard/Livre de Poche, 1955), p.141. My translation.



Green and Broderick struggled with their homosexuality to a significant degree and this tension manifested itself in their fiction. Broderick stated in an interview with Julia Carlson<sup>17</sup> that the Irish were pathological when it came to homosexuality and it is difficult to disagree with him on that point. What brings Green and Broderick close, however, more than their homosexuality, is their fascination with the mystery that is at the heart of existence. The element that shocked Irish readers most when *The Pilgrimage* was first published in 1961 was not so much the daring descriptions of sex but rather the last sentence of the novel: 'In this way they set off on their pilgrimage, from which a week later Michael returned completely cured.' (p.191) Many found it blasphemous that a man as flawed as Michael should be the recipient of grace. Julien Green penned an excellent Preface to the French translation of the novel, which is reproduced in English in the Lilliput edition (2004). After stating his admiration for an 'extraordinarily gripping' book, Green asserts the soundness of Broderick's theology: 'Since when has healing been exclusively available to the just?' (p.2), he asks. There are indeed many examples in the Bible of how God's justice and curing were often extended to sinners and so Green correctly defends Broderick's choice of ending.

But let's return for a moment to the portrayal of sexuality by the two writers. In *Moira*, Green shows how difficult it is for religious fanaticism and a healthy sexuality to co-exist. In the course of the novel, Joseph Day struggles with his passionate nature, which he attempts to overcome. Simon Demuth's homosexual attraction towards him makes Joseph feel uncomfortable, but even the most obvious signs of his unspoken love, such as the flower Simon places on the hero's desk, fail to alert him to what is happening. He is as innocent about others' sexuality as he is about his own. His fight with Praileau provides an insight into where his true nature lies:

C'était en vain que son ennemi se tournait et se retournait de fureur entre ses bras ; à présent il le tenait sous lui dans l'étau de ses jambes et il lui fit toucher terre des deux épaules à la fois. [...] Joseph lui prit la tête entre les

<sup>17</sup> Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), p.46.

poings et d'une voix rauque, entrecoupée par l'effort, il s'écria : « Si je voulais, je pourrais t'ouvrir la tête aussi facilement qu'on casse un œuf. »<sup>18</sup>

What is being worked out in this scene is the struggle Green himself endured all his life with his homosexuality. Jacques Petit, in the Pléiade edition, points out the importance of the fight scene: 'Cette scène de bataille est peut-être la plus importante du roman. Elle est, Julien Green l'a noté, une « scène d'amour » (*Journal*, 23 septembre 1950) ; Joseph, sinon Praileau, l'ignore et le romancier lui-même n'en prend conscience qu'assez tard (*Journal*, 13 octobre 1948), lorsqu'il découvre le lien entre le désir et le crime chez son personnage.'<sup>19</sup> It is in this context that we should consider the comment of Praileau, who predicts to Joseph: "Il y a en toi un assassin."<sup>20</sup> Joseph tries to kill with violence his sexual nature and it results in an actual murder at the end of the novel when he kills Moïra, who enters his room by stealth and to whose charms he finally succumbs. Having access to Green's *Journal* is of inestimable value when it comes to assessing his thoughts as he was composing his novels. With Broderick, no such resource is available. What is clear, however, is that the two novelists saw women and sexuality in general as being closely associated with sin. Grace intervened at times, as at the end of *The Pilgrimage*, but it was a rare occurrence indeed.

*The Waking Of Willie Ryan* possibly brings to mind Mauriac more than Green. It is a fine analysis of the hypocrisy and callousness of a well-to-do family when one of their number, Willie, becomes involved with a local widow, Roger. Thanks to the machinations of his sister-in-law, Mary, who claims he assaulted her years previously, the silence of his brother, Michael, who abused him sexually during their childhood, and the collusion of the local priest, Fr. Mannix, Willie is incarcerated in a lunatic asylum for over 30 years. Everybody who knows him realises that Willie is no madman. A combination of his homosexuality and his neglect of his religious duties are sufficient cause in the eyes of the family for his committal to the mental home. They are greatly shocked when he reappears one day and goes to stay with his nephew, Chris, who takes his side once he realises what really happened all those years ago. Mrs. Ryan tries to justify their actions to her son by pointing out that Willie

<sup>18</sup> Moïra, p.24.

<sup>19</sup> *Oeuvres complètes*, p.1574.

<sup>20</sup> Moïra, p.26.



was a pagan: "He has never been to Mass or confession since he was a young man, and he didn't change his ways in the asylum."<sup>21</sup> Religious hypocrisy was a major bugbear of Broderick's, as it was for Mauriac and Green. Mrs. Ryan herself is quick to find fault with the Church's new-found interest in, and commitment to, the poorer elements of society and contrasts this to Fr. Mannix's lifestyle: "Who does he think he is anyway? Ten minutes late every morning saying Mass and the rest of the time playing golf and bridge!" (p.62) She also wonders how appropriate it is for a priest to be driving around in a big Mercedes.

Always quick to emphasise her own piety and commitment to religion, Mrs. Ryan is someone whose courtship of social respectability resembles that of Bernard Desqueyroux, in Mauriac's finest novel, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. In fact, Mauriac's heroine, Thérèse, is so filled with abhorrence for her husband's hypocrisy that she attempts to poison him. A prude when it came to sexual behaviour, this did not prevent Bernard from assuming a hideous appearance when taking possession of his wife, who is described as his 'accustomed prey'.<sup>22</sup> Shocked by the shameful appearance of women in a Parisian night club they visit at the end of their honeymoon, Thérèse can only marvel that this outwardly chaste, judgemental man is the same one who will soon be making her submit to his 'patient inventions in the dark.' (p.49) She notes: 'I've often seen Bernard sink himself entirely in his pleasure – and me, I played dead, as if the slightest movement on my part could make this madman, this epileptic, strangle me.' (p.49) Social respectability is what matters above all else to people like Mrs. Ryan and Bernard Desqueyroux. They never pause to reflect on how their own behaviour is at variance with the values they outwardly cherish most.

The best parts in *The Waking of Willie Ryan* are undoubtedly the exchanges between Willie and Fr. Mannix. The cleric is aware that Willie only agreed to receive Holy Communion at a special Mass organised by the family to prove his rehabilitation to the outside world, so that he could live out his remaining days in peace. The two discuss Willie's former lover, Roger, and how he apparently renounced his sinful ways and

<sup>21</sup> John Broderick, *The Waking of Willie Ryan* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2004), p.47.

<sup>22</sup> François Mauriac, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. Translated by Raymond Mackenzie (New York: Sheed & Ward, 2005), p.55. All references will be to this edition with the page numbers in brackets.

reconciled himself with the Church. What Fr. Mannix didn't realise was that Roger and Willie continued to see each other in secret. Willie takes great pleasure in setting the record straight:

"Roger never gave up what you like to call 'vice'. If it's of any interest to you now I never wanted it, not with him anyway. It was he who – how would you put it? – seduced me. Yes, that's how you'd put it. I hated it: but I did it because I loved him." (pp.200-201)

The priest is visibly thrown by that revelation. One of Broderick's successes in this novel is the manner in which he resists the temptation to demonise Fr. Mannix who only realises late in life that his parish is inhabited by people who are in the main apathetic to religion outside of the social, utilitarian value it can afford them. He is closer in many ways to Willie, whose reasons for not practising his religion are more honourable than those who use it simply for their own advancement. Before the fateful Mass in his nephew's cottage, Willie has a moment of revolt when he is tempted not to go through with what he knows to be a sham. He says to Susan, his nephew's girlfriend: "Oh God [...] it's the same old pattern all over again. Toe the line and play the hypocrite! If I had done that twenty-five years ago I wouldn't have been sent away." (p.172) Like many of Mauriac's characters, including Thérèse, Willie has a much stronger attraction for the supernatural than the rest of his family. It is their superficial observance of their religion, their parody of the Christian life, that prevent him from opening up to the possibility of a divine presence. His comment to Fr. Mannix is revealing: "Perhaps you only recognise what you call 'infernal grace' when you're told about it. After all it's easy to preach to the converted, even if they only pretend to be converted." (p.199)

Willie achieves some kind of peace at the end of his life. The night he dies, Broderick notes: 'Outside the falling snow muffled the earth. And the old weep quietly.' (p.236) There is a serene sadness about this description, a hint that some kind of supernatural presence may be at work. The impression given is that Willie, like Michael at the end of *The Pilgrimage*, could have been the beneficiary of grace. Remark the way in which nothing is stated with certainty. The same is true of the endings of *Moïra* and *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. Joseph Day, after murdering Moïra, is offered a means of escape by his former adversary, Praileau, but chooses instead to give himself up to the authorities. He meets with the calm



David Laird whom he beseeches not to speak to him about God. David saw the danger with his friend's passionate nature and yet admits to him:

« Je ne te juge pas, je ne t'ai jamais jugé. [...] J'ai toujours cru que tu valais mieux que moi. Je le crois encore. Moi, je ne serai jamais qu'un petit pasteur. Mais toi... »<sup>23</sup>

The last lines of the novel describe a man coming towards Joseph in the twilight. We are not informed who this person is or what his role will be in the hero's destiny. What we do know is that Joseph has been humbled by his experiences and made aware of his weaknesses. There is some hope in that alone.

What of Thérèse then? The end of the novel sees Bernard accompanying her to Paris, where she will be allowed to spend her life free from the cage of family. Her accommodation with her husband has been achieved mainly as a result of her having played the role of dutiful wife in front of her sister-in-law's fiancé, who naturally harboured some doubts about this infamous family member. For a brief moment, Thérèse considers the possibility of resuming her life with Bernard: 'Now she seemed to perceive a light, a kind of dawning, and she imagined a return to that secret, sad country: she imagined a whole life of meditation, of perfecting herself in the Argelouse silence, an interior journey in search of God ...' (p.119) She who was considered a renegade by her husband and his family has a spirituality that is lacking in them. She at least knows she is a sinner. When Bernard asks her why she tried to poison him, she attempts to explain:

"What I wanted? It would probably be easier to say what I didn't want. I didn't want to keep on playing a role, speaking only set formulas, denying every second a Thérèse who ... But no, Bernard, look: I'm only trying to be truthful – so why does everything I tell you sound so false?" (p.121)

Her husband, regretting his momentary weakness, immediately resumes the role of respectability: "Lower your voice: the man behind us has started to listen." (p.121) The attempted reconciliation breaks down because of Bernard's inability to comprehend his wife's complex character. For him, everything is black and white and Thérèse's paradoxes only of-

<sup>23</sup> *Oeuvres Complètes*, p.192.

fer him agitation. No one but God can say what fate holds in store for the likes of Joseph Day, Willie Ryan or Thérèse Desqueyroux.

So, for all that separated Broderick's fictional world from that portrayed in the French 'Roman Catholique' there is enough convergence in his portrayal of sinners who reach an accommodation with God for us to speak of what the French refer to as 'connivence', or complicity, with the likes of Mauriac and Green. In her book dealing with the life and works of John Broderick, Madeline Kingston suggests something which coincides with our own reading of events:

The Catholic Church in republican, secular France was very different from the Catholic Church of Holy Ireland: its novelists were originally defending the Church against the overt onslaughts of the state and later against the tide of scepticism and scientific advance. But if, as has been suggested, Broderick in writing this work was attempting to reinvent himself as a French-style catholic novelist, he came close to success.<sup>24</sup>

The problem lies with determining exactly what we mean by the term 'Catholic Novel'. At the beginning of this chapter and elsewhere<sup>25</sup> I have attempted to come to grips with this concept. I find much to admire in the definition of Albert Sonnenfeld:

It (the Catholic Novel) is a novel written by a Catholic, using Catholicism as its informing mythopoeic structure or generative symbolic system, and where the principal and decisive issue is the salvation or damnation of the hero or heroine.<sup>26</sup>

There is no such tradition I can detect in the Irish novel, with the possible exception of Kate O'Brien's *The Ante-Room* (1934). Broderick's characters are without doubt placed in a world whose 'generative symbolic system' (to use Sonnenfeld's phrase) is definitely governed by Catholicism,

<sup>24</sup> Madeline Kingston, *Something in the Head: The Life and Work of John Broderick* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2004), p.122.

<sup>25</sup> Louise Fuller, John Littleton and Eamon Maher (eds), *Irish and Catholic? Towards an Understanding of Identity* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2006). See chapter 6, "Representations of Catholicism in the Twentieth-Century Irish Novel", pp.103-119.

<sup>26</sup> Albert Sonnenfeld, *Crossroads: Essays on the Catholic Novelists* (York {South Carolina}: French Literature Publishing Company, 1980), p.vii.



but the salvation or damnation of his heroes or heroines is not the controlling preoccupation of his novels. He is much more concerned with social satire than with theology. *The Pilgrimage* is the closest he comes to producing a 'Catholic Novel' but the heroine's spiritual plight is rarely, if ever, touched on. Her husband is the one who benefits from grace and we are never given access to his private thoughts. The Irish wrote out of a tradition that was completely different to that of the French. There had not been the debates between positivism and Catholicism that marked the Enlightenment, for example, or the upheaval of the French Revolution, the separation of Church and State in 1905. In Ireland, Catholicism was the majority religion and people tended to blindly follow its dictates because they didn't possess the sound grounding in philosophy that characterises the French educational system and which trains people to critically assess and filter the knowledge that is imparted to them. Brian O'Rourke captures the reasons why the Catholic Novel did not flourish in this country:

However, I feel it is only fair to say at this point that I suspect that the non-emergence, to any notable degree, of an Irish 'Catholic novel', may have something to do with statistics and voluntary stance, as well as with imaginative disposition. Several of the French novelists we have studied speak of their work as constituting a conscious witness to the faith and this seems to me not unconnected with their consciousness of writing for a de-Christianised public. Conversely, I have the impression that some of the Irish novelists might have been more 'Catholic' if more of their compatriots were less so.<sup>27</sup>

The French Catholic novelists of the twentieth century were aware that their audience was mainly constituted of people who were at best lukewarm about their religion. They sought therefore to put forward dramatic examples of characters whose main concern is to ensure eternal salvation. The Irish, on the other hand, rather than emphasising the metaphysical, tended to concentrate on underlining the hypocrisy and intolerance of those who used religion for their own purposes. This is a possible explanation for the difference between the role of the Catholic novel in the two cultures. In Broderick's case we find someone who is more comfortable

<sup>27</sup> Brian O'Rourke, *The Conscience of the Race: Sex and Religion in Irish and French Novels 1941-1973* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1980), p.62.

when attacking complacency than when exploring the nuances of inner turmoil. While definitely influenced by Julien Green and François Mauriac, he stopped short of ever producing an Irish equivalent of the 'Roman Catholique'. I'll close with a revealing comment by Aunt Kate, a defrocked nun who appears in Broderick's second novel, *The Fugitives*. She captures the stance of the Irish novelist very well:

"Only the really religious people turn against religion in this country. The ones that are at the top and bottom of every religious organisation are the ones that have no religion at all."<sup>28</sup>

"We were killed off when the Americans arrived  
A bloody morning, weights and gold blood  
Outside the slaughter house, from the night road  
They would have loved the white light  
From behind a long wall and a gate of steel  
In every place and space, getting close the hill  
Two lines of dark guns on their shoulders, waiting  
A moment that had never and never been  
Sunlight broke and went like a long lance  
Dangling for eternity

Now that my heart that  
When they were here, the night was the night  
As they moved in, the night was the night

"I am sure that some day, I will be a man  
Someday, perhaps, I will be a man  
But to day, I am a boy and a boy  
Or maybe, perhaps, I will be a man